

493 now of iron but formerly of wood, that rotates with them. The wheels are so small—little more than two feet in diameter—that the floor of the car has to be raised up behind, and it carries such a small load that the number of horses in Ireland is said to have been considerably reduced when the spoke-wheeled cart took its place. In the 18th century "wheel-cars were used throughout the kingdom" in town and country alike: the Dublin "noddies" were of this type, and according to illustrations published in the early 18 hundreds the driver rode on the horse's rump. The low-backed car is now generally fitted with sides to make a "box car," but in former days it carried a kish of the kind used with the slide car. It should be noticed that until roads and tracks were [493] metallised—mostly within the last two centuries—the disc wheel had the advantage over the spoked wheel in soft loose ground. Even "superior farmers" in Donegal had only low-back cars as late as 1821, and we may repeat the statement made in Chapter 6 that there was "no wheel car" among a population of 8,000 in one Donegal parish in 1837. The slide [177] car and the creel did all the carrying. In the Glens of Antrim, too, the wheel-car was apparently something of a novelty about that time. An old man told me that his grandmother remembered the first car seen in her valley.

It must not be assumed from this that wheeled vehicles [401] were unknown in ancient Ireland: the literature suggests that they were in regular use but doubtless confined to the wealthier classes and districts. On analogy with other parts of north-western Europe the wheel was already known in Bronze Age Ireland. It is wrong to assume that the wheel was "invented" by the Irish peasants who adapted it to their slide cars. The disc and in turn the spoked wheel are ancient discoveries which came into use gradually as social conditions and road-making improved, and it was natural that the slide car should keep its form though lifted off the ground. Although we cannot accept the theory of local "evolution" for the spoke-wheeled cart, it is none the less clear that local experience controlled the details of its construction when it became

CARS AND CARTS

rear ends of the shafts, which are, however, left projecting so as to take the weight of the tilted car when it is not in use. It is these projecting shafts or 'trams' which give the wheel-car the appearance of a slide-car on wheels and seem to confirm the suggested evolution (Fig. 55). 493

In eighteenth-century Ireland possession of a wheel-car was a mark of social distinction, and entire districts were without wheeled vehicles of any kind. Down to the middle of the nineteenth century it was considered 'respectable' to go to 'meetings' in a wheel-car in the Presbyterian parts of north Antrim. In the course of the nineteenth century, as the larger spoke-wheeled cart was adopted by prosperous farmers, the little wheel-car sought refuge in the poor mountainous districts where we find it clinging precariously today. As late as the 1914-18 war one was in use on a farm on Black Mountain, within the city boundary of Belfast (Pl. 8, 2). 493 554

The wheel-car has its place in history because it was the ancestor of the nineteenth century jaunting-car which Lloyd Praeger rightly lists as one of the essentially native Irish products.¹ The platform of the wheel-car, to which a box body or a wicker-work creel was secured when goods were being carried, became a seat, covered with a straw mat, when the vehicle was used for social occasions. The passengers sat on each side, back to back, their feet dangling near the ground or resting on a hay-rope slung fore and aft, which could accommodate any length of leg. By the end of the eighteenth century this 'side-car', fitted with wooden foot-rests, had become a standard hiring vehicle, and it needed only the substitution of spoked for solid wheels, the addition of springs and consequent alterations of height to give the Irish jaunting-car which Bianconi adopted in 1815 and later developed into the four-wheeled long-car.² There can be no doubt that 'the Bians', traversing the highways and byways of the whole country, made a contribution to the social and economic life of Ireland which was, in its day, as important as that of the railway in the latter part of the century or the motor bus in the twentieth century. 493

The spoked wheel, which throughout the eighteenth century 401

¹R. L. Praeger, *The Way that I Went* (1937), Ch. I. 177

²I. J. Herring, *U.J.A.*, 5 (1940), 115-22; *U.J.A.*, 7 (1944), 42-46.

CARS AND CARTS

493 was reserved for coaches and the carriages of the rich, was popularized by its adoption for farm carts (Scots carts) under the improving zeal of landlords towards the end of the century. 177
[401] In Ulster, which has always looked to Scotland for its inspiration, the Scots cart was first used for transporting linen, and one thinks of it spreading along the improved roads and being copied and adapted to local needs and traditions. Around Lough Erne, for instance, one reads of large one-horse carts, adopted by carriers in the early nineteenth century, which had 'trams' or rearshafts four feet long,¹ and these projections, surely a reminiscence of the long slide-car runners, are still characteristic of the 'flat' carts of the west and south-west (Fig. 60).

493 The Scots cart with its four-foot wheels was able to take twice the load of the native wheel-car, and as industry increased and roads were improved through the nineteenth century it drove the block-wheeled cars off the roads. But for rough work in the fields and bogs various types of slipe were preferred: the cart was little used for harvesting and its possession was to some extent a sign of prestige. (Unlike the native car, the woodwork [554]
[531] of the cart was and is brightly painted, usually in red and blue.) The slipe and slide-car were better adapted to moist ground, to undrained fields and the uneven surface of ridge and furrow. As roads and farm practice were improved it was a new version of Scots cart (Fig. 60) which ultimately drove out the slide-car and the wheel-car in Ulster. It seems that the older varieties of Irish carts were derived from the Leith cart of the eastern lowlands of Scotland.² The body consisted of little more than a slatted platform without fixed sides and ends. This 'flat cart', as distinct from the 'box cart', is the usual pattern of farm cart in the west of Ireland and, fitted with springs, is the common hawkers' cart. As a farm cart it suits the small farmer because it can be used for a variety of purposes by fitting different kinds of sides, for example tall slatted 'crates' for carrying turf.

493 Towards the middle of the nineteenth century there was evolved, in Lanarkshire and the neighbouring counties, the box 177
531 cart with upright panelled sides perhaps derived from the

¹L. Atthill, *Recollections of an Irish Doctor* (1911), 44.

²R. L. Edgeworth, *An Essay on the Construction of Roads and Carriages* (1813).

176 [text continues on p. 178]